SUBSTANCE

OF

A SPEECH,

DELIVERED

AT THE CICERONIAN SCHOOL,

GLOBE TAVERN, FLEET-STREET,

MONDAY, 2 MAR. 1795,

ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

" AT THIS AWFUL MOMENT OF DIFFICULTY AND
" DANGER, WHICH BEST DESERVES THE
" PUBLIC CONFIDENCE,
" MR. PITT OR MR. FOX?"

By JOHN GALE JONES.

" NEQUE DEDI, NEQUE DO FIDEM INFIDELI CUIQUAM."

CICERO DE OFFIC.

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BRITISH
MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION.

IT would ſeem to be the policy, as well as the practice, of every individual who appears before the public for the firſt time in print, to court its favour or deprecate its cenſure: yet although this may at firſt ſeem the moſt ſafe or prudent, it is not, therefore, the moſt honourable. To dread inquiry can be the reſult only of conſcious inability, and to ſolicit undeſerved applauſe is a proof of mental degradation.

For theſe reaſons, I hope I ſhall not be accuſed of pride or affected ſingularity, ſhould I aſſert it as my opinion, that upon the preſent ſubject, ſilence would be my moſt effectual recommendation.

If the following compoſition poſſeſs any real claim on public attention, its intrinſic merit will beſt appear by the encouragement which it will receive; if otherwiſe, I ought rather to rejoice at its being ſuffered to ſink into ſilent obſcurity.

I might with propriety ſtate, what is the actual truth, that the ſuggeſtions of friendſhip, and my own implicit confidence, have induced me to believe, that it may not, at the preſent moment, prove wholly unacceptable; but friends are often

partial, and an author is ſeldom ſufficiently qualified to judge of his own productions.

Something may perhaps be allowed for the peculiar circumſtances under which it at firſt appeared, and for the time and place where it was delivered; obſervations which, when coolly examined in the cloſet, would fail to attract attention, often experience in public aſſemblies a conſiderable portion of applauſe, either from the ſingular impreſſion of the moment, or from the conſideration of preceding circumſtances to which they form an immediate reply.

It is almoſt unneceſſary to add, that part was the reſult of a few hours previous preparation, and part, the unſtudied conception of the moment; the former will not be alledged as a cauſe of cenſure, nor the latter as an excuſe for folly: to be ſlovenly is at all times inexcuſeable, but to be accurate is ſurely no fault.

I have endeavoured to reduce the whole into as regular a connection, as the nature of the ſubject would admit, and it now remains for an impartial public to determine how far I have been ſucceſsful.

Old Bond Street,
6th March, 1795.

BRITISH MUSEUM

J. G. JONES.

QUESTION,

MONDAY MARCH 2nd. 1795.

"AT THIS AWFUL MOMENT OF DIFFICULTY AND DANGER, WHICH BEST DESERVES THE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, MR. PITT OR MR. FOX?"

ENCOURAGED by that flattering partiality, which has ever been amply ſhewn in this reſpectable aſſembly towards thoſe who, like myſelf, poſſeſs but ſlender abilities, and urged by the continued ſilence which ſeems to prevail, I again riſe, Mr. Preſident, to offer my ſentiments upon the important queſtion which now awaits your final determination.

To recapitulate all the ſucceſſive meaſures which have diſtinguiſhed the political career of theſe two celebrated opponents, would be impoſſible, if endeavoured, and if poſſible would be abſurd; it might

might exhibit indeed, an oſtentatious diſplay of fancied acquirement, but it would convey little real ſatisfaction; it would diſtract the attention, while it ſought only to inform the underſtanding.

Yet although a minute inveſtigation ſhould be avoided as tedious, a general inquiry is undoubtedly neceſſary, to remove ſuſpicion or confirm the truth: to claim confidence it is requiſite to prove deſert, and he who ſolicits public approbation, muſt willingly conſent to be arraigned at the bar of public examination, and to afford by a memorial of his paſt ſervices, reaſonable and well grounded expectations of his future conduct.

Without noticing, therefore, every occurrence which has taken place, during the adminiſtration of Mr. Pitt, or the oppoſition of Mr. Fox; I truſt that I ſhall not on the one hand be accuſed of too great a conceſſion, nor on the other be charged with unneceſſary ſeverity, if from a curſory review of the moſt material circumſtances, I acknowledge that ſome degree of cenſure may fairly be attributed to the latter, a ſmall ſhare of merit allowed to the former; but that unqualified praiſe or unlimited confidence can be juſtly claimed by neither.

As

As we are, however, called upon to decide, not what is faultleſs, but what is beſt; to conſider, who is the moſt praiſeworthy, not who is infallible; and to determine, which, upon the whole, has exhibited the feweſt proofs of inconſiſtency or folly; a very little reflection will enable us, without heſitation, and without reſerve, to yield the decided palm of ſuperiority to Mr. Fox.

His oppoſition to the meaſures of adminiſtration has been the reſult of conviction, and the offspring of ſincerity. If he have ever ſeemed to depart from the ſtrict line of conſiſtency, it has originated from the amiable weakneſs of the friend, rather than from the accommodating ſervility of the courtier: if he have erred in his political calculations, it has been from the abſence of ſuſpicion, not from the preſence of guilt; ſince even his miſtakes have been favourable to human happineſs, and his errors on the ſide of virtue!

His India bill, if I be rightly informed, went to place the management of Eaſt India affairs, chiefly under the controul of the Houſe of Commons, inſtead of ſuffering it to remain under the immediate patronage and direction of miniſters; his oppoſition to Lord North, was an oppoſition to the American war, which he juſtly conceived to be ruinous

ruinous to the commerce, and deſtructive of the intereſts of this country; and his ſubſequent coalition with that nobleman, may be conſidered the ſacrifice of a generous mind, when he diſcovered that the meaſures which he had ſeverely reprobated, were not ſuggeſted by *him*, but promoted by a corrupt and ſecret influence, which had firſt unjuſtly loaded him with reſponſibility, and afterwards procured his diſgrace.

If theſe be contended, however, as placing Mr. Fox's conduct in an unfavourable point of view, ſtill the manly and firm perſeverance, which he has ſince ſhewn in oppoſing meaſures the moſt inimical, and principles the moſt unfavourable, to liberty and juſtice, ought ſurely to cancel his former errors, blot out the remembrance of his failings, and again reſtore him to confidence and public favour.

I need not call to mind the various ſervices he has performed, nor the many exertions which he has made for the benefit of his country; they are ſtill remembered with gratitude and delight, and are the more conſpicuous as they form ſo ſtriking a contraſt to the meaſures which his opponent has purſued.

If

If we inveſtigate the conduct of Mr. Pitt, we may review it with equal candour, but not with equal ſucceſs.

We ſhall ſee, during the progreſs of his ſhort but fatal adminiſtration, ſcarce any thing to applaud, and almoſt every thing to condemn. His efforts have been vain, his deſigns miſchievous. He amuſed us with ſplendid promiſes of ſucceſs, and has inſured us nothing but defeat. He held forth the pleaſing deluſion of a ſpeedy millenium, only to render an approaching bankruptcy the more terrible; he has put calamity out to intereſt, and conſolidated diſaſter. Coming into office with all the formal ſanctity of an hypocrite, he now continues to perpetrate his follies with the unbluſhing effrontery of a knave: he ſat out with the preſumptuous ambition of a Phaëton, and will doubtleſs experience the fall of Icarus!

How has he abuſed the confidence of a generous nation, and trampled upon the liberties of an unthinking people! There was a time when he had only to aſk, and it was chearfully given; when, if he but ſpoke, his opinion was conſidered a law. The fame of his illuſtrious father, deſcended as a poſt obit on the head of his ſucceſſor; and the

ſon of Chatham was vainly ſuppoſed to poſſeſs, by inheritance, his talents and his virtues.

He began his career under the moſt auſpicious circumſtances, and with the moſt promiſing expectations of ſucceſs. His youth was a plea for indulgence, his inexperience a ſanction for folly. The degraded ſituation into which this country had then fallen, the odium which miniſters had deſervedly incurred, and the ill ſucceſs of the American war, naturally diſpoſed the people to view with the moſt favourable diſpoſition, *any* one who would ſtrenuouſly exert himſelf in oppoſing projects ſo ill concerted, and conſequences ſo diſaſtrous. A moderate ſhare of abilities became a ſufficient paſſport to obtain popularity, and he was ſtamped as a genius before he knew even the firſt rudiments of his political vocabulary.

To divert, if poſſible, the critical eye of obſervation from too ſevere a ſcrutiny into his own qualifications, it became neceſſary to magnify the errors and expoſe the failings of others: the worn-out maſk of patriotiſm was aſſumed to conceal his unbounded ambition; he profeſſed reform while he coveted abuſe, and talked of liberty when he was about to enſlave!

Proud

Proud of his fancied ſuperiority, he eagerly ſought a pretext to exhibit his ſkill, and preſerve his reputation.

The banners of reform were unfolded, and the independent portion of mankind was invited to rally round the ſtandard of truth. He attacked the Houſe of Commons—the public applauded—St. Stephen's trembled—corruption tottered to its baſe. The charge was founded—he proved ſucceſsful—and like Hercules, at the ſiege of Mycene, was the firſt to ſcale the walls. Scarce, however, had he reached the utmoſt ſummit of his wiſhes, when, Oh! inglorious change! unmindful of his former profeſſions, and inſenſible to ſhame or virtue, he graſped the thunderbolt of power in his own unhallowed hands, and flaſhed the forked lightening in the eyes of his deluded followers. Mourn! Britain, mourn! that for benefits ſo laviſhly conferred, you ſhould have been repaid with treachery and ingratitude; and that the reptile which you cheriſhed in your own foſtering boſom, ſhould have ſtung you to the quick!

It had ever been, hitherto, the characteriſtic of a brave and generous nation, to relieve oppreſſed humanity, and aſſiſt virtue in diſtreſs: but it was

 reſerved

reſerved for the enlightened politics of the preſent day, and the ſuperior adminiſtration of Mr. Pitt, to depart from ſuch ſafe and honourable maxims; to withhold aſſiſtance when moſt needed; to interfere where exertion was fruitleſs, and to combat where victory was diſgrace.

We all remember, that truſting to our promiſes, and confiding in our aſſurances of protection, the brave King of Sweden was encouraged to commence hoſtilities againſt the perfidious Catherine; but deſerted in the hour of danger, alone and unaſſiſted, he was ungenerouſly left to ſuſtain the unequal conflict, and to reſiſt her formidable power: his own ſingular courage, however, extricated him from his perilous ſituation, and enabled him, ſword in hand, to obtain for himſelf a ſpeedy and an honourable peace.

The balance of power has ſerved with the preſent miniſter, as a favourite watchword to propagate deluſion and excite alarm. When Oczakow fell into the hands of the Ruſſian Empreſs, its vaſt importance was inſtantly held forth, and all Europe was ſaid to be in danger: but when ill-fated Poland was laid low, and her fruitful fields made deſolate: when her liberties were invaded by lawleſs

deſpots,

deſpots, and their gallant defender, Koſciuſko, overthrown, it was treated as a light and trivial occurrence; it was conſidered but as the common topic of a day, and the balance of power was forgotten!

The panegyrics beſtowed on this extraordinary miniſter are as curious, as they are extravagant; a gentleman, in the courſe of this evening's diſcuſſion, at one moment, told us that he deſcended, as an angel from heaven, inveſted with celeſtial ſplendor; at another, that he roſe (I will not add from the regions of Pluto) like a beauteous Phœnix from the aſhes of his departed fire. He compared him alſo, to a dazzling meteor, and I marked the expreſſion, as peculiarly felicitous; ſince it is the province of thoſe fiery exhalations, by their artificial ſplendor, to delude the weary and benighted traveller into a fallacious expectation of imagined ſecurity; to lead him through unknown and unfrequented paths, and at laſt involve him in ſudden and inevitable ruin!

He tells us alſo, that the preſent is a period fraught with imminent danger, and is, therefore, of all others the moſt improper to ſeek a change of miniſters, or expoſe the veſſel of the ſtate to the rocks

rocks and quickſands of popular contention. I readily grant that we are indeed in a critical and awful ſituation, but the queſtion, which immediately recurs to every reflecting mind, is, *who* brought upon us this unexampled calamity, and reduced us to this exhauſted condition?

When the loud whirlwind rages, and the dreadful tempeſt wars; when ſhelving rocks appear, and the helpleſs bark is threatened with immediate deſtruction; ſay, could you rely with implicit confidence on the aſſurances of the unſkilful boaſter, who by his incapacity and miſmanagement had expoſed you to this fatal danger? or would you not rather ſeek for ſome abler pilot to ſteer the leaking veſſel, and direct her tottering courſe?

It would be an unneceſſary intruſion on the time and patience of this intelligent aſſembly, to expatiate on all the ſubſequent meaſures which have owed their origin and progreſs to the adminiſtration of Mr. Pitt; the calamitous war in which we are unhappily engaged, and in which we have borne ſo conſiderable a part, although affording a fruitful ſource of accuſation and inquiry, muſt therefore be omitted; it may be truly ſaid to reſemble the hand-writing on the walls of Nebuchadnezzar,

Nebuchadnezzar, and ſeems to be the finger of Heaven!

The ſyſtem of internal policy which he has purſued in this devoted country, has been equally well calculated to deſtroy confidence, and excite ſuſpicion; the many inroads made upon our conſtitution, and the hourly infringments of our moſt valuable rights, have at length begun to alarm even the inconſiderate, and provoke the timid!

Let us, however, enjoy at leaſt, the little that *yet* remains; and though our perſonal liberties may be endangered, aſſert the independence of the mind; let us expoſe the brazen ſlipper of this modern Empedocles, and ſhew to the deluded people that he is not a God!

To Mr. Fox, ſir, do I look for the reſtoration of that peace and tranquillity, which is ſo eſſential to the liberty and happineſs of mankind: in oppoſing the deſtructive meaſures of the preſent miniſter, he has conſulted the welfare, and is therefore, I think, juſtly entitled to the confidence of the people of England.

J. G. JONES.

THE END.

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